CONTEMPORARY INDIAN ART SERIES

1051

# RAMKINKER

LALIT KALĀ AKADEMI

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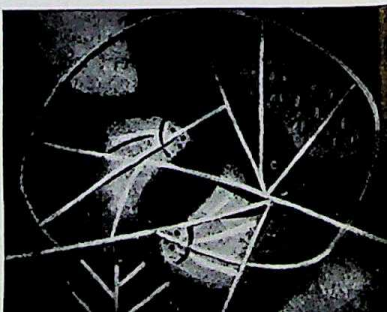
# RAMKINKER

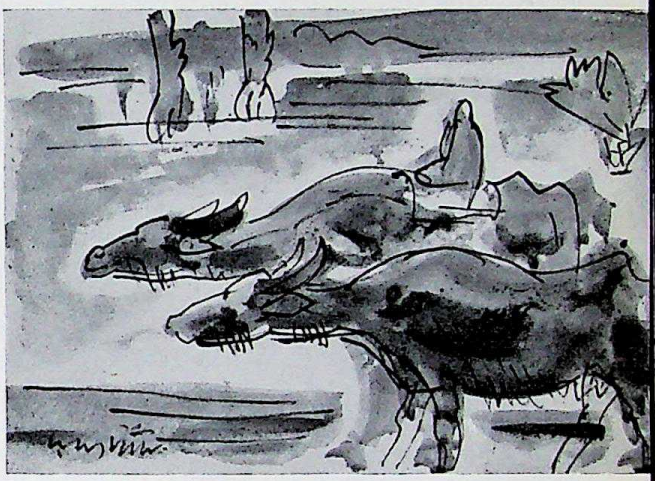
Ramkinker may be considered the most important original sculptor working in India in the period of transition from a traditional to a modern art. His significance lies in the fact that he was not traditional or academic in an age that was guided by the conventional but built up a style and a body of work that is essentially individualistic, based and rooted in his own personality and environment. The sculptors and painters of his time are of two main kinds, firstly those of the Bengal School who had evolved a nationalist and romantic art and secondly those who adhered to the strict academism of the Schools of Art based on Western models. Ramkinker's art in contrast is essentially pioneering and personal. It is characterised by tremendous energy, is exuberant, strongly vital, reaching for the light. It has the surging movement of growth and its figures and forms are dynamic and earthy. It is typical of Ramkinker that most of his work is out of doors. His creations belong to the wind and the soil and is part of the bursting of fruit and flower. To some artists their work is informed with a sense of struggle. Even the finished work is not restful for, apart from its own dynamism, one feels in it the questioning and striving of the artist. Ramkinker's is such a personality; and when through passion, purpose and effort the work of art at last comes into being, it is a birth not of a complacent ideal but of a volatile entity with the marks, accidents and vitality of life itself.

Ramkinker was born in a village near Bankura, Bengal, in 1910. He was educated at Bankura from where he finally went to Santiniketan in 1925. In those early days life in Santiniketan was idealistic, simple and joyful. The poet Tagore lived among his students and was a liberal influence. Among the asramites were many minds whose vision, catholicity of taste and deep humanity inspired the young people there. Ramkinker earned while he learned and in an environment particularly suited to his temperament found his own fulfilment in sculpture and painting. Music, drama and poetry as much as the natural beauty of the place have all contributed to his growth and were part of this ideal environment.

Ramkinker has lived in Santiniketan for over 37 years. For the last three decades he has been a distinguished member on the staff of Kala-Bhavan, the Art School. In the Studio or out of it he works with a restless persistence, little caring for the relentless summer Sun or the hours of darkness or light. When he is free from the challenge of work he has time for conversation, song, or long walks into the countryside where he is at home among the Santal peasants. He is hardly ever tired or irritable, never worried about time or the future. He has a bouyancy of spirit, a native humour and a natural confidence uncontaminated by the scramble for fame or wealth. His anchor is his art and his work is an affirmation of his zest for life.



Ramkinker's sculptures have a marked out of doors quality. They are created on location and so grow out of their context. The forms whether in cement, plaster or stone arise and are proliferated by their own laws. He uses an idiom which is joyous and vital and whether abstract, representational or stylised the forms have the quality of growing things. They surge out of the earth or are implanted holding together both



a story monumentality and living lines. The artist arrives at a finished work after immense labour ; the emergence of the idea as form is organic, slow but definite. Each composition possesses a latent energy and puts out some tremendous gesture part human, part earthy, part symbolic.

Ramkinker has never hesitated to strike out on new paths of his own. This characteristic of revolution and new vision

marks him out as one of the first of the true modern sculptors working in India. In the choice of materials as well as in their use he observes those rules which serve his purpose. He works for himself and this gives him an immense freedom. His works are unlimited by any confining rules, confidently contemporary.

Among his major works are his free standing outdoor compositions : **Santal Family** a rough textured group with its multiple figures and strong movement finely contrasted with the static peace of its environment. This sculpture by the road carries with it the movement of the road and the lush animation of primitive people. Another memorable piece is **Sujata** a monumental standing figure of a girl attenuated but wiry carrying within herself the free nature of the trees amongst which she stands. A remarkable abstract work is the design for a Lamp in the Garden of the Guest House at Santiniketan, the rhythms of the sculpture repeating as in music the main theme of the surrounding trees. Ramkinker is also a remarkable portrait sculptor.

His **portrait of a Lady** in bronze (now in the National Gallery of Modern Art) and the portrait head of Mr. Ganguli (Plate no. 6) are masterpieces of draughtsmanship, power, and feeling.

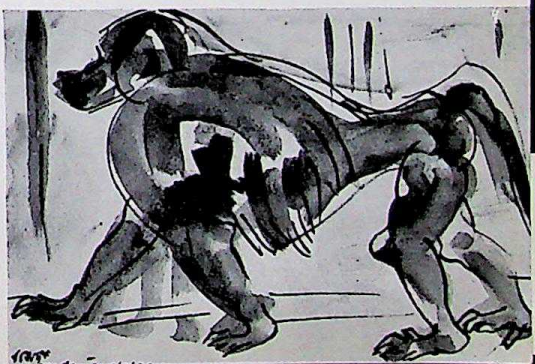
Ramkinker is also a considerable painter. He started art with miniature painting but soon adopted oil and

water colour which gave him much greater scope for expression. His oils in particular have always been experimental moving restlessly from portraiture to abstract design, from tragic vignettes to bold monumental works of great simplicity and grandeur.

Other types of art (he is extremely versatile) which have interested him are design, drama and graphic reproduction. While of water colours and brush drawings his output is continuous and prolific.

Ramkinker's oils are unconventional. In portraiture he achieves not only a fine painting but a strong interpretation of the sitter's character. In composition, especially in landscape, his style shows broad structural organisation, a spaciousness and atmosphere in which are set his epic forms. The water colour if more conventional have a racy strength and spontaneity. His brush drawings include anecdotes and motifs from everyday life treated with a lively brushwork and the brevity of essential notes.

Talking to Ramkinker about art is to feel the fresh breeze of an open mind. To him art is reasonless and causeless. He does not work for profit. He paints or sculpts because he must just as a flower must bloom even in a forest where its beauty remains unseen. Its blooming is inevitable ; the soil, the sky, the seasons and the sun have conspired aimlessly to enable it to flower. Its consumation and justification are in its blooming, perhaps even wastefully. To the artist the whole theory of demand and supply in relation to art seems to be born of a creative barrenness and poverty



of imagination. The artist does not wait for a demand but carries the demand within himself. All creative acts wait for no demand, they await fulfilment. To-day critics discuss the influences of museums without walls. We all have our personal museums peopled with our experiences, childhood images, memories of classical painting, the formulæ of our teachers, books, conversations and finally the great art of God's natural world. But when the artist works he forgets even the vast museums he carries within him. He enters his own mystic dwelling, his own source of strength and wells up ineffably in an upsurge of creative joy. To Ramkinker art is a challenge, the challenge of creative vitality to the barrenness, ugliness and pettiness of our lives. The challenge and the responses are like a game for art is playful, winning or losing is hardly important but playing is. To Ramkinker art is Maya mysteriously false yet that which makes life worth living.

Jaya Appasamy

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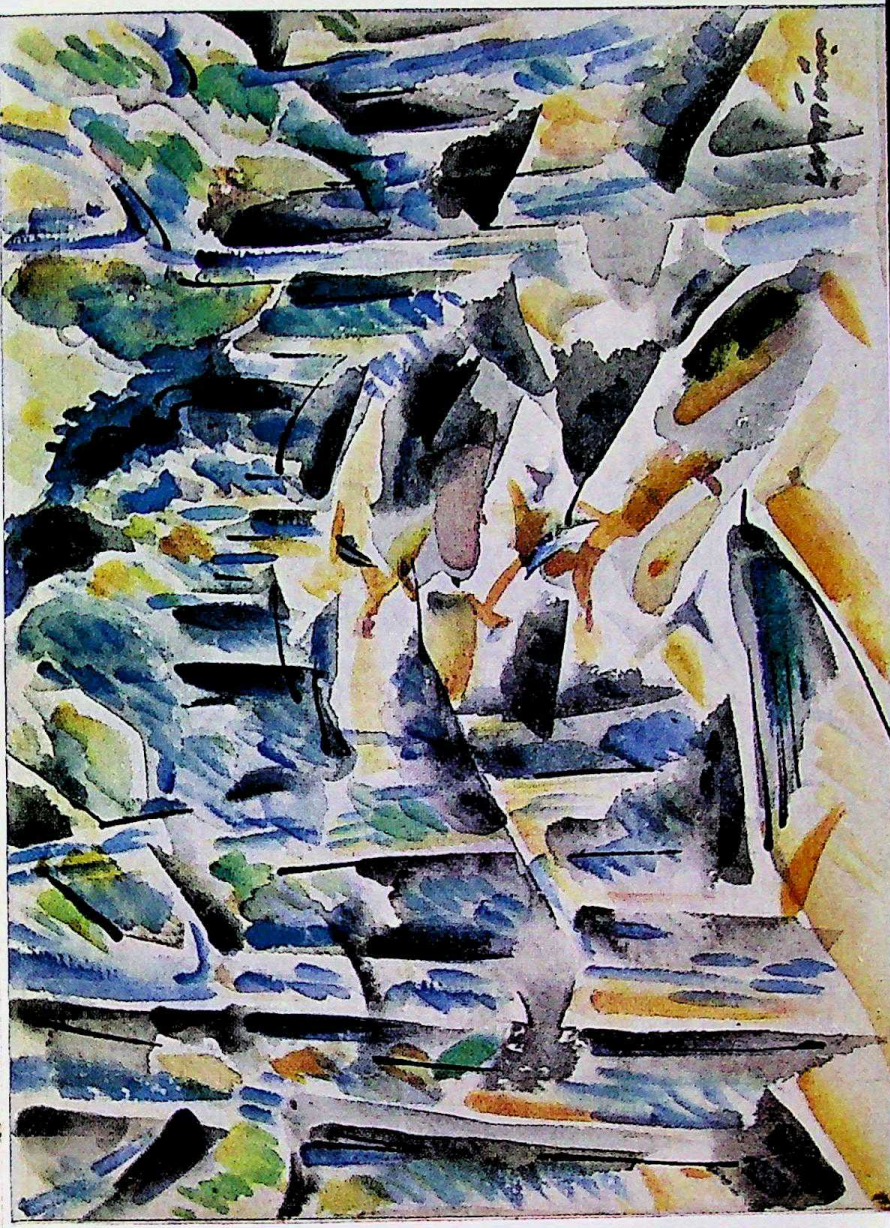

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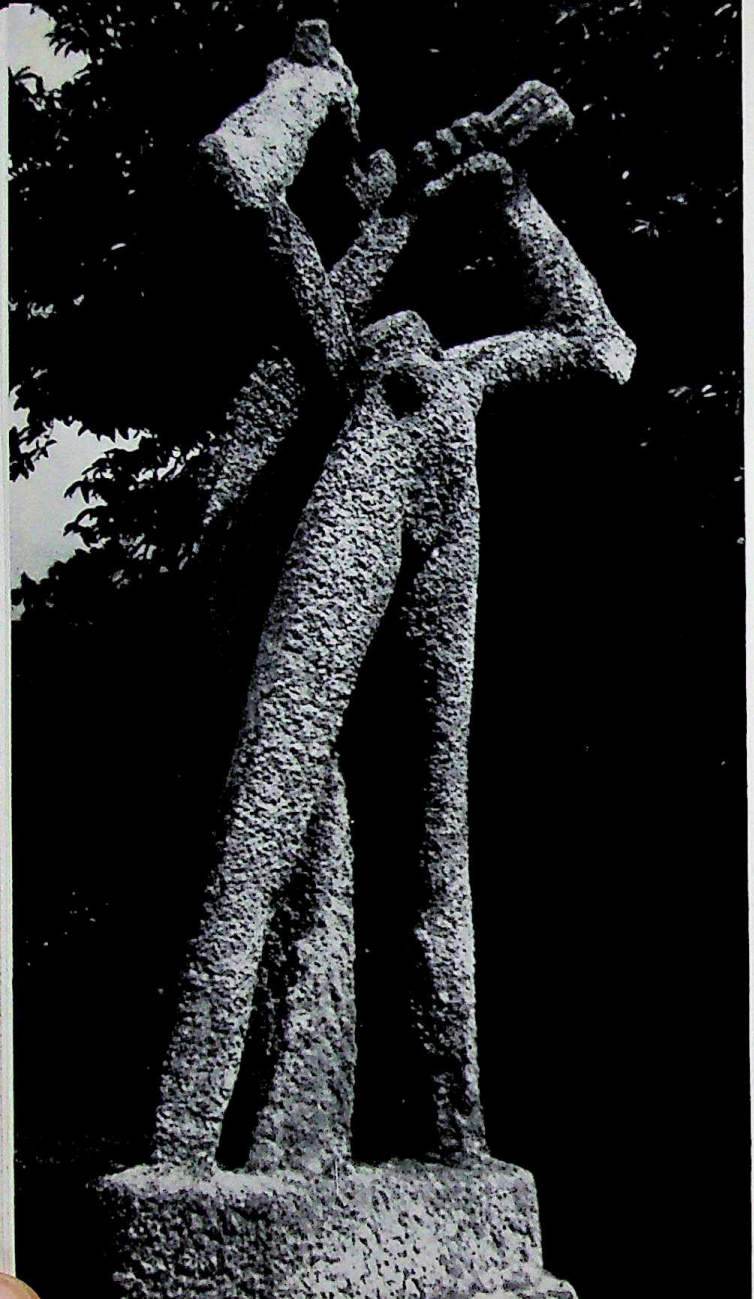

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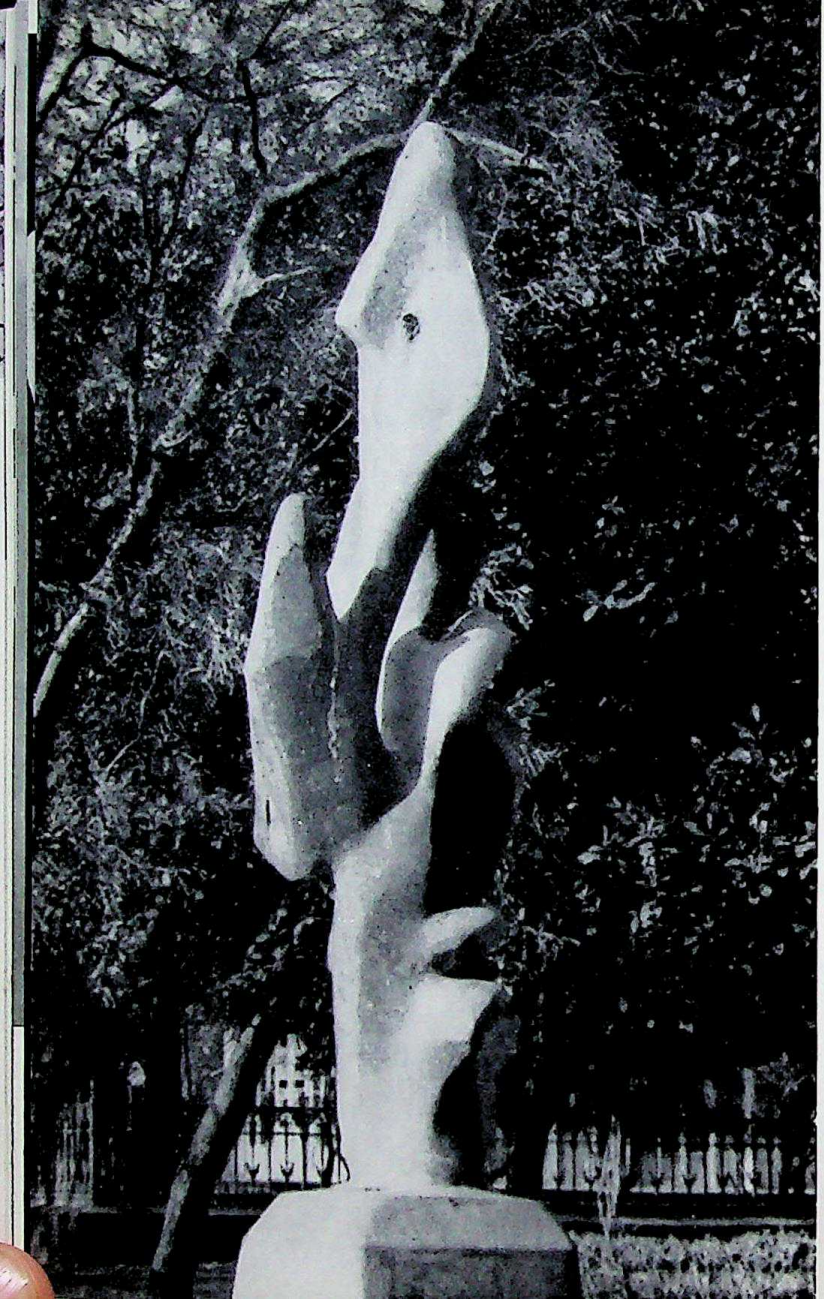

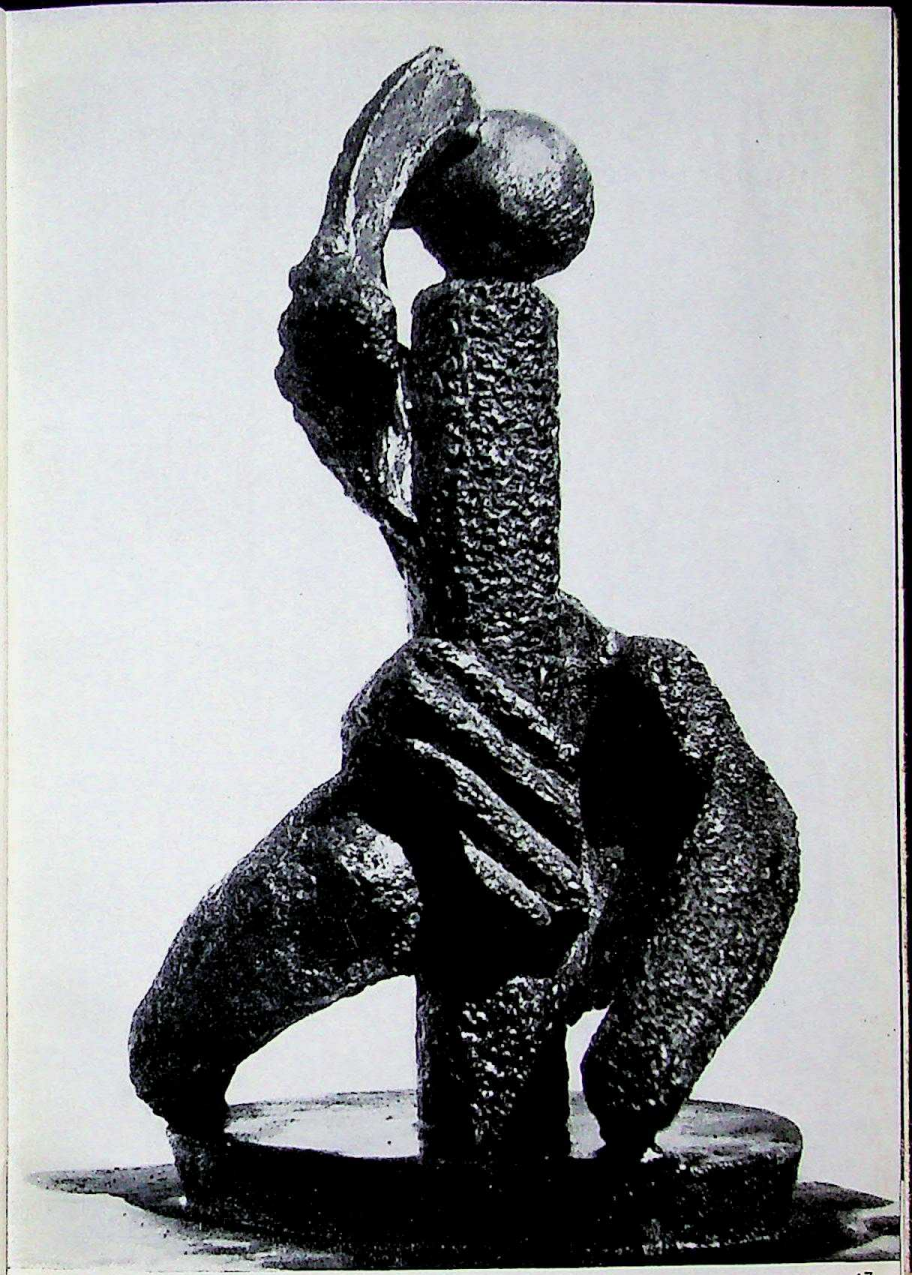

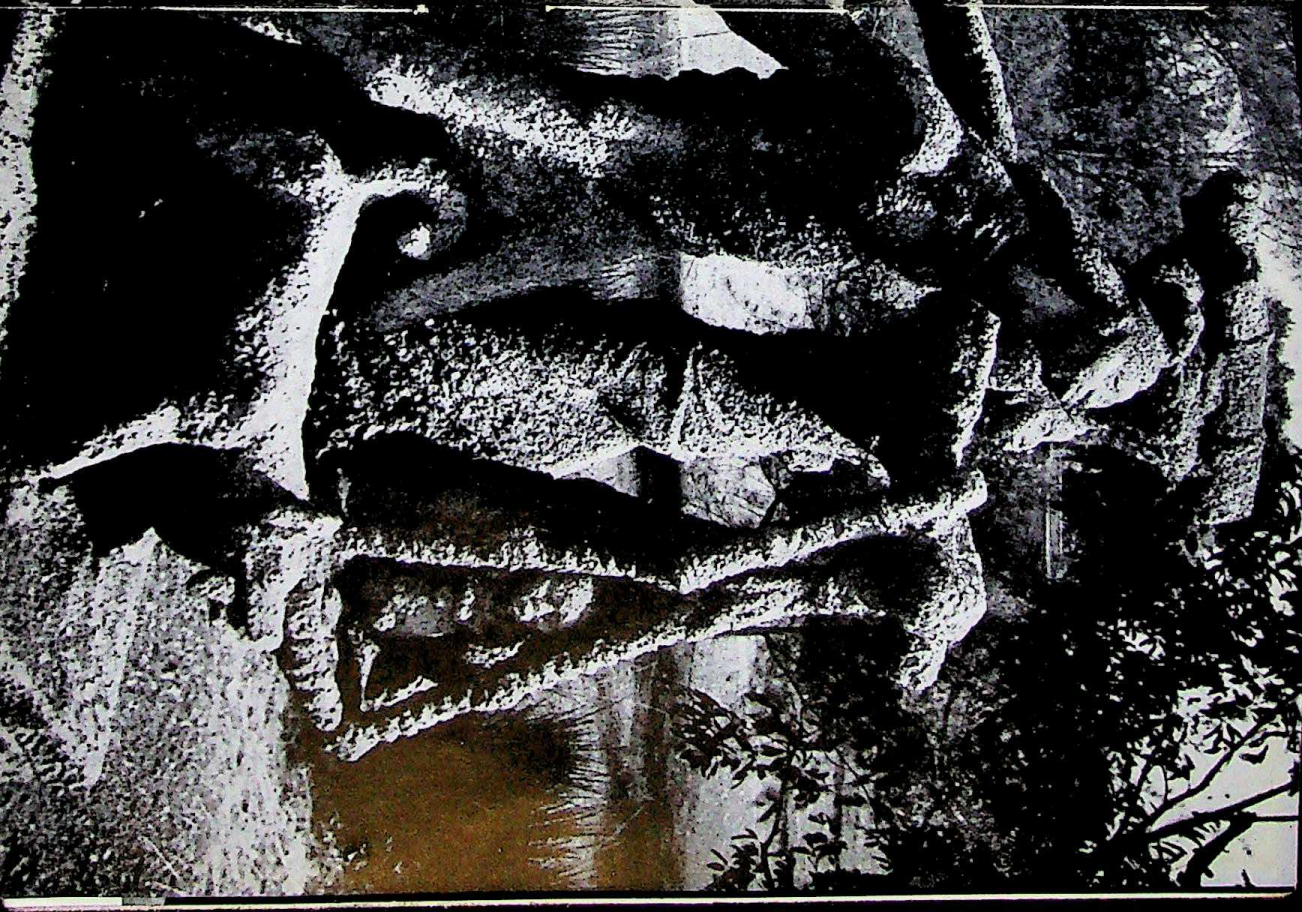

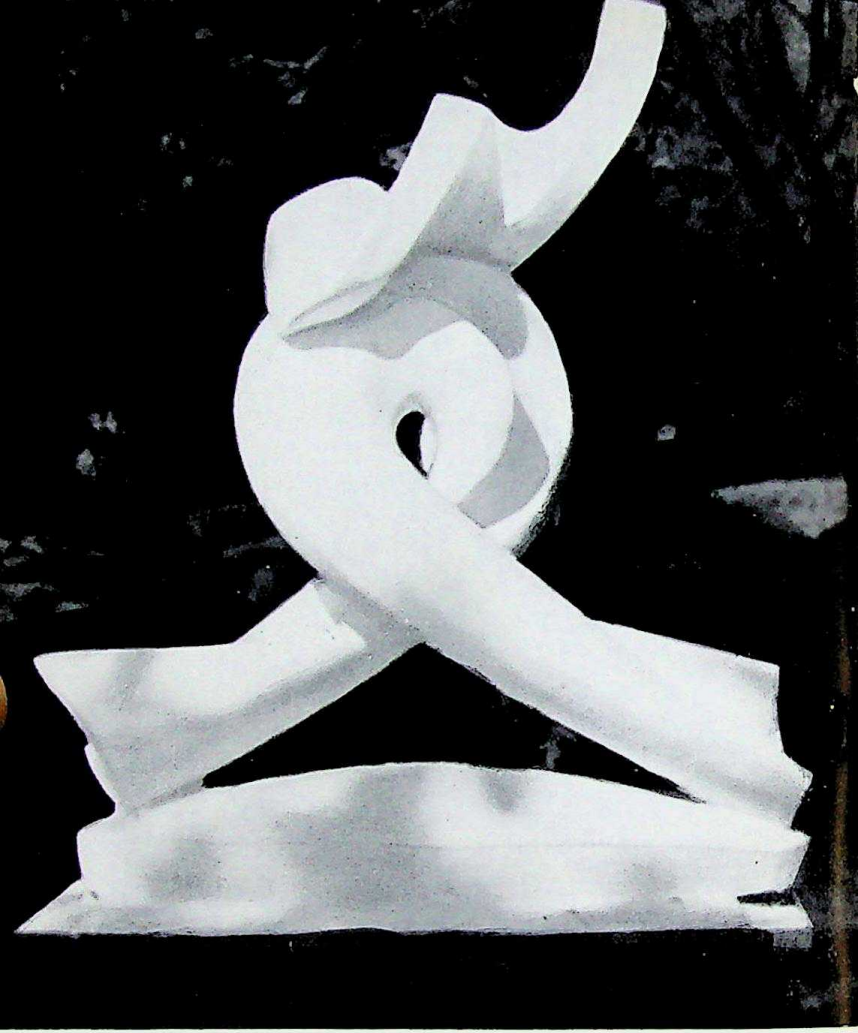

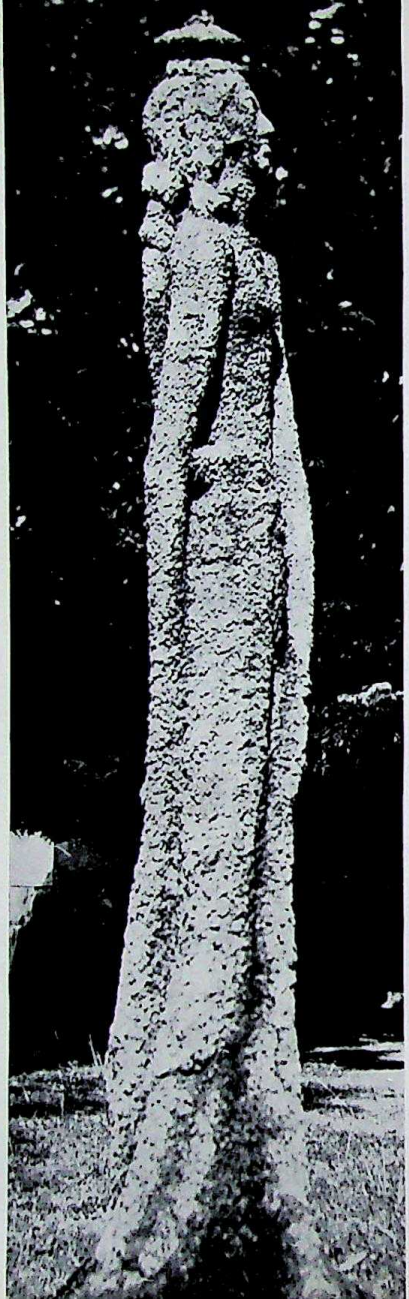

RAMKINKER LALIT KALA AKADEMI

| No. | Title | Medium | Year | Size | Collection |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | Portrait of Tagore | Bronze | 1941 | 76 Cm. | |
| 2. | Landscape | Water Colour | 1944 | 16x12 Cm. | |
| 3. | Portrait of a Lady | Bronze | 1949 | 46 Cm. | National Gallery of Modern Art |
| 4. | Portrait | Oils | | | |
| 5. | Portrait of Abanindranath Tagore | Cast Stone | 1943 | | |
| 6. | A Portrait | Cast Stone | 1936 | | |
| 7. | Harvest | Water Colour | 1948 | 23x14 Cm. | |
| 8. | Harvester | Direct Concrete | 1943 | 305 Cm. | |
| 9. | Kacha & Devayani | Plaster | 1929 | 30 Cm. | |
| 10. | Milk-Maid | Water Colour | 1948 | 24.5x17 Cm. | |
| 11. | Head of a Woman | Cast Stone | 1939 | 61 Cm. | |
| 12. | Composition | Cement | 1943 | 51 Cm. | |
| 13. | Mithun | Cast Stone | 1931 | 30 Cm. | |
| 14. | Composition | Plaster | 1949 | 135 Cm. | |
| 15. | Drawing | Ink | 1945 | 32x21 Cm. | |
| 16. | Lamp Stand | Direct Cement | 1941 | 274 Cm. | |
| 17. | Composition | Cement | 1948 | 51 Cm. | |
| 18. | Santal Family | Direct Concrete | 1938 | 427 Cm. | |
| 19. | Painting | Oils | 1951 | 91.5x61 Cm. | |
| 20. | Speed | Plaster | 1953 | 152 Cm. | |
| 21. | Poet's Head | | 1938 | 46 Cm. | |
| 22. | Sujata | Direct Concrete | 1935 | | |
| 23. | Profile | Plaster | | | |
| 24. | Reaper | Water Colour | 1959 | 28x19.5 Cm. | |
| 25. | Trees | Ink | | | |

All the works except for plate No. 3 are in the Artist's Collection.

# BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

RAMKINKER—b. 1910 at Bankura, West Bengal. He was keenly interested in art even as a child and soon developed into a professional artist, attending to odd commissions besides working for the village theatre. In 1925 Sri Ramananda Chatterji, founder of the "Modern Review" picked him up and brought him to Sri Nandalal Bose for higher studies in the Kala Bhavan, Santiniketan. Although he is acknowledged as an outstanding sculptor, Sri Ramkinker is also a distinguished painter. He obtained Diploma in Fine Arts from the Visvabharati University where he is Head of the department of sculpture at present.

It was about 1925 that he took to modelling seriously which completely changed his outlook as an artist. It was again during this time that he embarked upon the abstract phase of his art. By 1935 his works showed considerable emphasis on the structural quality which distinguishes his mature work. The years from 1930-40 proved to be the most fruitful years : his important works "Sujata", "Santal Family" and "Girl and the Dog" belong to this period. During 1940-50 he became even more absorbed in the problem of abstract, surrealistic imagery. He held his first one-man show in New Delhi in 1942. His works were seen again, in 1960, in an exhibition organised by the Visvabharati Union at Santiniketan and in Calcutta organised by the Calcutta Arts Council. He has been regularly showing his work in important all-India exhibitions, including the National Exhibition of Art and earlier his works were regularly seen at the exhibitions of the Indian Society of Oriental Art, Calcutta. His works have been included in a number of exhibitions abroad : Realities Nouvelle, Paris (1950 and 1951) and Asian Art Exhibition, Tokyo. Sri Ramkinker has a commission to execute two stone statues of 24′ for the Reserve Bank of India, New Delhi.

Sri Ramkinker was for sometime nominated artist member of the Lalit Kala Akademi. He is a member of the Realities Nouvelles, Paris and the Indian Sculptor's Association, Bombay. Represented in the Lalit Kala Akademi's Permanent Collection, the National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi and in several private and public collections in India & abroad.